

You are a... SERF

Most of the peasants in the middle ages were serf farmers. They were not considered free and were bound to their plot of land. They worked almost seven days a week and were required to give a certain number of days each week to work on their lord's land. In return they gained land rights. Essentially, they owned the land they farmed. No one could take it away from them while they were alive unless there was extenuating circumstances such as a crime that was committed. A farmer's life was generally hard and full of physical labor, very different from our society today.

Farming

The medieval farmer usually had two crops: a spring and a fall crop, the spring consisting of barley, vetches, oats, peas, and beans, while the fall was mainly wheat and rye. Each type of seed was used in a different manner. The rye and wheat, in addition to being sold for cash, were used for bread. The barley was used for beer and the hay and oats were fed to the horses and other livestock such as oxen. To get the fields in proper growing condition, the farmers used oxen to plow the land. Most farmers did not own enough oxen themselves, so plowing was a communal activity. Many farmers combined forces to tame the hostile soil. Additionally, the sowing of the fields was on a three year cycle. For any particular field, it was sown for two straight years, and the left fallow for the third. This allowed the soil to regain nutrients, to be ready to host another crop again soon, and to produce more. Also, because they grew more than one crop, they employed a system of crop rotation which is still used today. In crop rotation, different crops are planted on the same field in different years. One year they might plant wheat. The next year they might plant barley. Barley and wheat use different nutrients. That way the nutrients barley uses will build up in the soil while wheat is growing. Then barley is grown which uses up the nutrients in the soil. While the barley is growing, nutrients that wheat uses collect in the soil. The next year wheat is grown again. The cycle continues. Fertilizer was also commonly used. A common technique was called marling. The marling process consisted of spreading clay containing carbonate of lime onto the soil, thus restoring much needed nutrients to grow crops. They also used manure to fertilize, which came from the livestock that they raised, such as sheep, pigs, cows, chickens, and the occasional goat.

Women

The wife of a farmer also played an important role on the farm. She would usually help with the rearing of the chickens. These were sold for extra money or killed and eaten by the family. She also cooked and preserved the food, and she acquired extra money by spinning thread and then selling it. Additionally, the thread was used to make clothes for the family to wear. She also brewed ale, made butter and cheese, and other condiments for the house to use.

You are a... CRAFTSMAN

Skilled craftsmen were of vast importance to the medieval town and castle. They helped to mend metalwork, mill crops, build houses, and do many other important things. Without their expertise in the making of goods, most of the medieval towns would not have survived because individual families could not have produced all the necessary goods to sustain life in the village. Also, the carrying on of the family profession was a honor, and many families were famous in their profession.

Training:

Children usually began their formal training for their profession around the age of eleven or twelve. They would either learn and carry the family business, or they could become an apprentice to a local craftsmen. They trained for seven years before moving out and starting their own shop, or taking the families on. Most were married, and their wives would help in the labor of day to day life, and then producing children to continue the cycle. Also, almost all craftsmen were free.

Different Types of Craftsmen

There were many professions which the children could choose to take-up, and all were equally important in the society. All parts of the town depended on the craftsmen's goods. Millers ground the grain that the farmer's provided them. They were integral part of the society and were also the richest of craftsmen. They were also the most disliked. They paid the lord to operate his mill and everyone was required to use his mill. Blacksmiths made the tools which most of the other workers needed to do their job. They also had an agreement with the lord. In return for charcoal, they performed all of the castle's metal working needs. Bakers were responsible for providing food made out of bread to those who were not farmers. The farmers grew many of the necessary items to feed the town's hunger. Shoemakers and seamstresses kept the town's clothes in descent shape. Candlemakers helped keep the homes lit. Thatchers helped to make thatch roofs for barns and other buildings. Carpenters repaired wooden objects like buildings and carts. As you can see, if any one part of the town failed, the entire Medieval structure suffered along with them.

Guilds

The unions of the past were known as guilds. They were one of the most influential organizations of that time. They flourished because of the main reasons they were formed: to protect the business from the merchants, to ensure high standards and a high quality of work, and to look after the old and sick members of the guild. The regular town merchants needed protection from the merchants who came in a provided cheap labor. The people of the town always wanted the job to be done right the first time, with as little money spent as possible. The guilds helped ensure that the job would be done right by having training requirements for their workers. Also, when the workers became ill, or became too old to work any longer, the guild supported them and their families. They usually had a central shop which was elaborately decorated and showed their wealth.

You are a... KNIGHT

The knight was one of three types of fighting men during the middle ages: Knights, Foot Soldiers, and Archers. The medieval knight was the equivalent of the modern tank. He was covered in multiple layers of armor, and could plow through foot soldiers standing in his way. No single foot soldier or archer could stand up to any one knight. Knights were also generally the wealthiest of the three types of soldiers. This was for a good reason. It was terribly expensive to be a knight. The war horse alone could cost the equivalent of a small airplane. Armor, shields, and weapons were also very expensive. Becoming a knight was part of the feudal agreement. In return for military service, the knight received a fief. In the late middle ages, many prospective knights began to pay "shield money" to their lord so that they wouldn't have to serve in the king's army. The money was then used to create a professional army that was paid and supported by the king. These knights often fought more for pillaging than for army wages. When they captured a city, they were allowed to ransack it, stealing goods and valuables.

Becoming a Knight:

There were only a few ways in which a person could become a knight. The first way was the normal course of action for the son of a noble:

When a boy was eight years old, he was sent to the neighboring castle where he was trained as a page. The boy was usually the son of a knight or of a member of the aristocracy. He spent most of his time strengthening his body, wrestling and riding horses. He also learned how to fight with a spear and a sword. He practiced against a wooden dummy called a quintain. It was essentially a heavy sack or dummy in the form of a human. It was hung on a wooden pole along with a shield. The young page had to hit the shield in its center. When hit, the whole structure would spin around and around. The page had to maneuver away quickly without getting hit. The young man was also taught more civilized topics. He would be taught to read and write by a schoolmaster. He could also be taught some Latin and French. The lady of the castle taught the page to sing and dance and how to behave in the king's court.

At the age of fifteen or sixteen, a boy became a squire in service to a knight. His duties included dressing the knight in the morning, serving all of the knight's meals, caring for the knight's horse, and cleaning the knight's armor and weapons. He followed the knight to tournaments and assisted his lord on the battlefield. A squire also prepared himself by learning how to handle a sword and lance while wearing forty pounds of armor and riding a horse. When he was about twenty, a squire could become a knight after proving himself worthy. A lord would agree to knight him in a dubbing ceremony. The night before the ceremony, the squire would dress in a white tunic and red robes. He would then fast and pray all night for the purification of his soul. The chaplain would bless the future knight's sword and then lay it on the chapel or church's altar. Before dawn, he took a bath to show that he was pure, and he dressed in his best clothes. When dawn came, the priest would hear the young man's confession, a Catholic contrition rite. The squire would then eat breakfast. Soon the dubbing ceremony began. The outdoor ceremony took place in front of family, friends, and nobility. The squire knelt in front of the lord, who tapped the squire lightly on each shoulder

You are a... LORD

The lord of a fief was the supreme ruler over his territory. From the feudal agreement he gained these rights. The lord's duties were many. He had to set up taxes and laws, oversee the day-to-day business of the castle and fief, and make decisions over punishments and other issues. Besides this, he had to serve his king by appearing in his court or fighting at his side. To cover the day-to-day tasks of managing the castle, a lord often hired a steward. The steward was the head of all the castle's staff, except for the military personnel. Sometimes there were two stewards; one in charge of all of the lord's estates, and the other in charge of just the castle. In either case, the steward was the lord's main adviser on issues that the lord was to decide. The steward often helped with the lord's accounts and books. He calculated the revenue from taxes and the money spent by the lord. The steward was also the head of the lord's court in his absence. In this way, the lord had an immense load taken off his shoulders through the help of a steward or stewards. The steward gave the lord time to fulfill his other obligations. The lord usually traveled for a good part of the year around to the far corners of his land holdings. This allowed him to get an idea of how well the people were, and to assess the possibility of revolt in the other areas of his fief. Other responsibilities that the use of a steward gave him time for were to fight alongside his king in battle, to train and compete in tournaments if he was a knight, and to appear in his lord's court to pay him "homage and fealty".

The lord was often surrounded by grandeur and finery. He had his own room in the castle with a bed and expensive chests for his clothes. He also had fine clothes with decorative belt buckles and other jewelry. In addition to this, he had servants to wait on his every need. Many noblemen had people to dress them when they got up. They also wore perfume and kept herbs in their room to make it smell nice. Every extravagance was available to a lord because of his immense wealth and station.

Hunting was a favorite pastime for a medieval lord. It was also the main source of meat for the lord's table. There were two main forms of hunting: falconry and the hunting of land animals. The noblemen did their best to maintain forests for their own private use. They passed laws so that no peasants could hunt in the forests. If a peasant poached in the forest, he could have his hand or head cut off. In this way, the lords were free to hunt in the forest all of the time. There was also an abundance of game because of this. The prey was usually a stag, a doe, or a boar. Hounds were trained to track down the prey by its scent and to obey signals on a horn. The hunt was led by a huntsman, a member of the lord's staff. He would find the prey, and then the lord would decide if it was worth hunting. If the lord said that they would hunt it, then the huntsman would circle the animal and chase it back towards the hunting party. Then the chase began. The nobles and their ladies rode on horseback behind the hounds and chased the prey through dense forests and over ditches. A hunt could last for many hours. When the prey was finally caught and killed, a song was played to honor the dying animal. A great feast followed the hunt with the freshly-hunted animals as the main course!